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A GOLDEN RULE.

A sermon preached by Edward Mason, at Farmersville, Ohio.

TEXT: "Judge not that ye be not judged."—Matthew 7:1.

One of the most powerful scenes in Shakespeare represents King Henry the Sixth and his lords, standing by the death-bed of Cardinal Beaufort, and listening with horror to the gasping words in which the dying man in his delirium is revealing his share in the murder of Gloster. The gentle monarch beseeches him to make some sign that even at that supreme moment he is penitent. But he dies in "black despair." And one of the lords exclaims: "So bad a death argues a monstrous life." In letters of gold the king's reply might well be written, "Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all!" The same lesson is taught but with greater force, by our Lord's treatment of the poor sinful woman dragged into his presence by the Pharisees. Was she innocent? By no means. But she felt her sinfulness, and the Pharisees did not feel theirs, and therefore it was much more important to convince them than to condemn her. Hence those burning, searching words, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

The first two words in our text form the nucleus of the whole chapter. Everything that follows in the entire passage grows naturally from that. The word in the original is expressive of a judgment, that is irrevocably fixed, a settled decision. By the teaching of Christ in the context, we find that the words, "Judge not," does not of course mean either of the two following things.

It does not mean that we are not to judge ourselves. The root of all true religion is the knowledge of ourselves as sinners in the sight of a holy God. Every man should know himself. This is really the great problem of human life. We are more anxious to investigate the feelings and motives of others than to look into our own hearts. Every man should search out his own inner nature, fathom its depths, measure its abilities, carefully watch its tendencies, to see whether they flow Godward or not.

Then again, it does not mean that we are not to form a proper judgment of the character of others. There is someting in our nature that leads us to form an opinion of our fellow creatures. It is rather the premature and uncharitable conclusions concerning the character of others than the forming of a harmless and just opinion that is here forbidden. There is a something within us that both induces and qualifies us to recognize the moral differences in society. By an uncontrollable instinct we learn to interpret the looks and actions of others, and we naturally are drawn to some and they become our bosom friends, while from others we turn in loathing and disgust. If we are not to form opinions, and indeed, indulge in righteous judgment how will we know with whom to associate? We surely are not to overlook the moral differences which are to be found in society. We surely cannot be expected to mingle with all in a promiscuous mass, and make demon and saint our bosom friends and confidants alike. Reason and Christianity forbids this. We are expressly told to *withdraw* ourselves from any brother that walketh disorderly. This implies the necessity of judging.

Then to whom and what does this warning refer? It refers to that uncharitable and censorious spirit which leads one to look unjustly and unfavorably on the character of others, and delight in unkind and perhaps unwarrantable criticisms upon them. It is intended for that class of people who are continually judging others severly, while they are very indulgent toward themselves. The spirit displayed by the Scribes and Pharisees, and so severely denounced and condemned by our Lord, is by no means confined to themselves, their age or their country. It is found everywhere. We find nation severely criticizing and unjustly condemning nation. We find one church speaking sarcastically and disparagingly of another church, and so all the way down. Class against class, family against family, man against man, until the world is full of rancor, vituperation and spite. And it all has its origin in the spirit of fault-finding.

Such a spirit is contrary to that of the Gospel, which teaches us that we should be reluctant to speak of the sins of men, and be more eager to save them from those sins than to chastize or severely judge them. To take pleasure in judging is to take no pleasure in saving. This is to violate both mercy and charity. We read of charity that it "vaunteth not itself." But he who judges another harshly, assumes that he himself is blameless. He wants it understood that he for one is free from the faults he condems. His great object is to have it understood that his greatness of soul is in proportion to his neighbor's littletleness, whom he belittles. He attempts to increase his own glory by tarnishing the fame of others. He adorns himself by stripping his fellowmen and builds himself up by pulling others down. Charity is further violated by the evil construction put upon things. Charity "thinketh no evil." This other spirit thinks of nothing but evil. It prefers any explanation of another's acts which makes them proceed from an evil motive, though an an easier explation might be found by attributing them to a good motive. It *works hard* to bring the accused in the wrong, instead of being ready to hope all things that will vindicate them.

Such judgment that we have spoken of should not be indulged in, because it provokes retaliation. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure he meat, it shall be measured to you again." None is so mercilessly judged by others as he that is always condemning others. Every one casts a stone at him. Like Ishmael his hand is against every man; and like Ishmael every man's hand will be against him. Whether the self-appointed judge is an arrogant schoolboy, or a young man full of self-conceit, or a gossiping and scandal-loving woman, or a sleek and solemn elderly Pharisee, the result will be the same in every case. It is a fact in morals as well as physics that like begets like. Kindness begets kindness, cruelty begets cruelty, falsehood begets falsehood, flattery begets flattery, and unkind judgment returns on the head of him who has been guilty of it. A man generally receives back from society that which he gives out to it, and that too, ofttimes with considerable interest. The history of the world abounds with examples. Society is to a man just what he makes it. It is generally a reflection of himself. The merciful finds mercy in it, and the malicious, malice.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," is a divine law. If he sows injustice here, although he may begin to reap the fruit even in this life, the great harvest will take place in eternity. Let us ever remember this great law of retribution, with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again. Who can picture a worse hell than that of our own bosoms in eternity, when all our motives and actions will be laid bare? What shame, remorse and confusion of face will he experience who has taken delight in stabbing the reputation of his fellowman in the back. The merciless defamer of character and his victim will have to confront one another there. In the next world all wrongs will be made right. They who have been unjustly condemned here will be justified there.

As regards the divine retribution with what judgment we judge, we shall be judged in the day of judgment. This does not mean that the unjust judgment of man will bring upon him a divine judgment that is also unjust. The Lord of heaven and earth will do right; but the severity that has been wrongly meted out to others will, through the operation of God's righteous law of retribution, become a measure of that dealt out to him who misjudges. The harsher and the more unjust his judgment of others, the greater his sin and the more punishment he merits. Every false and cruel word, therefore, which he utters shall increase his condemnation.

A disposition to pronounce a rash judgment upon others is indicative of greater evil in ourselves. In the same chapter, the comparison between the censurer and the censured is likened to a little splinter of wood—a mere "mote"—and a large log of timber—a "beam." The fact here intimated by Christ is that the greater sinner the man is, the more ready will he be to find fault in others. Pedly, who was a well known natural simpleton, was wont to say, "God help the fool." None are more ready to condemn the folly of others than those who have a small share of wit themselves. "There is no love among Christians," cries the man who is destitute of true charity. "Zeal has vanished" exclaims the idle talker. "O, for more consistency" groans out the hypocrite. "We want more vital godliness" protests the false pretender. As in the old legend, the wolf preached against sheep-stealing, so very many hunt down those sins in others which they gladly shelter in themselves. How severe was the judgment which David pronounced upon the man whose portrait Nathan drew! How rigorous and hasty was the judgment which the proud Pharisee in the temple passed upon the penitent publican. How ready were the scribes and pharisees ever to pronounce the severest judgment upon the conduct of Christ and his disciples,

The consciousness of personal faults should make everyone charitable and tender. Commonly speaking the best people are the most kind and gentle, and those who are ever ready to find fault with everybody generally have a good many faults themselves.

Those of us who have faults of our own are incompetent to pronounce a judgment upon others. In an engineer's workshop you may sometimes see a man turning to his fellow and pulling up his eyelid to have a speck of coaldust or a bit of iron filing taken out of his eye. Suppose the brother workman he turns to has just got a still more painful intruder in his own eye—what can he do? Will he say to the first brother: "Let me pull that out of your eye?" Rather will he say, "I am worse off than you; I can't see to do it. Go to some one else." How different it is with moral beams and motes! Yet what Jesus teaches is not merely that we *ought* not to judge others, or even to "behold" their motes until we have first "considered"—a stronger word—our own, but that we actually *cannot* do it. Our moral sight is paralyzed by our faults, so that we have not the power to judge fairly of our brother's. "Thou hypocrite," says Christ, "first cast out the beam out of thine own eye and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote (or splinter) out of thy brother's eye." Mark the words, "*then shalt thou see clearly.*"

A man with a "beam" in his character has neither the right nor the capacity to judge others. What right has he? Put a man whose moral nature is steeped in sin, whose hands are warm and red with the blood of his fellow, into the seat of the judge, to decide upon some trivial charge brought against another, and heaven and earth will cry out against your outrage of justice. But is not justice equally outraged when one sinner sits in judgment upon the character of another less guilty than himself. "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest for for whdreas thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest dost the same things."

We cannot see clearly as long as our eyes are blinded with cherished sins. They blunt the moral sensibilities, they weaken the powers of effort. There may be a "beam" in the eye of the soul, which hinders the light of reason and justice from illuminating the inner life and the man may not know it. This is one of the darkest facts in connection with depravity. There may be several things that tend to produce this unconsciousness of character. Men may get into this state through habit. A long course of sinful indulgence causes it to become part of our nature, that we are totally unaware of it. Then our associations have much to do in bringing about this state of heart. If, in every day life, he was called to mingle with the pure and good, he would be painfully reminded, by contrast, of his spiritual error and delinquencies. But instead of this all are of the same depraved class as himself. They breathe the same air, adopt the same maxims and follow the same principles. Then again, this state of mind is due to the power the god of this world has in blinding the eyes of men to justice, truth and light.

It might be asked how are we to know when to judge and when not to judge? How are we to discriminate as we are so fallible? Right at this point the Lord has given us a rule—a golden rule—which if followed will never lead us astray. This rule may be called the crown of the moral teachings of Christ. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."—If this were put universally into practice, it would be the death of evil-speaking, fault-finding, unjust judgment, grumbling and all other kindred evils. Charity, mercy, leniency and justice would reign in the hearts of men. This law is so intelligible that the most simple and illiterate can understand it. It requires no explanation. It is so reasonable also. Every member of the human family have same fundamental relations and rights as ourselves. Are we not all the offspring of the same Father, subjects of the same divine administration, sojurners together on the same earth, and candidates for the same eternity? Therefore ought we to do anything to others, that we would not have them to do us? This law condemns falsehood, dishonesty, cruelty, deceit, bloodshed and war, and all the social evils under which humanity has been groaning for ages. Man's departure from this law is their social ruin; their return to it is their only social salvation.

A father deeded his property to his only son, who was married, providing the son would support him for the remainder of his life. The deed was signed and delivered over, and the father became a member of the family. Soon, however, the old man began to find himself neglected. He was next removed from the family table to a block in the chimney corner, where he ate the morsel of food reluctlantly given him. At last the unnatural son resolved one day, to try to bread the afflicted heart of his sire. He procured a block and began to hollow it out. While at work on this, he was questioned by one of his own children what he was doing. "I am making a trough for your grandfather to eat out of," was the reply. "Ah," says the child, "and when you are as old as grandfather, shall I have to make a trough for you to eat out of?" This brought the unnatural son to his senses. The block was cast into the fire, and the old man's forgiveness was asked. You see what the application of the Savior's Golden Rule will do. It will restore justice and mercy.

Every sane person will acknowledge the minds of the world have acknowledged its power and wisdom. Hillel and Shammai were at the head of rival schools in the study of the Sacred Law. A gentile went to Shammai and said, "Teach me quickly the whole law, while I stand on one leg." The Rabbi drove him away in anger. The man then went to Hillel with the same request, and Hillel said, "What is unpleasing to thee, do not to thy neighbor. This is the whole law. All the rest is commentary." This is the substance of our Savior's teaching. Mark it carefully. It is not "what men do to you, do ye even so to them." No, it is "What ye would that men should do to you." Would not this make a glorious rule for all the churches. It teaches us Christian tolerance, and that would put an end to the censorious spirit that prevails so much. It would prevent unkind criticisms and that intolerant spirit which causes us to judge one another harshly and unjustly.

The harshness and injustice so common among the different Christian denominations would have a check, if our text were heeded. Christian tolerance would then be better cultivated. By Christian tolerance I mean a forbearing and kind treatment of the persons and the motives of those of our fellow Christians with whom we feel obliged to differ. If men thought, felt, and acted alike on all subjects, the world indeed would be more harmonious at present. But there would be no room for tolerance, and I do not believe that mankind would be improved by such a change. It would take the wind from the atmosphere, the tide from the ocean, the life and energy from all nature. Human society would be breathless, currentless and inanimate. The soul would slumber and a deathlike palsy would seize upon the human powers. There would be a spiritual stagnation. We have good reason then to be content with the present constitution of things, and even to rejoice that each mind is left to think and feel, to decide and act for itself. This imparts animation and a purifying energy to the whole mass of human society. But suppose a community of men, with minds diversely constituted and of various endowments and degrees of knowledge, each arriving at different conclusions, and each bent upon forcing his views upon the others, what would be the result? The jarring sound of Milton's infernal doors, grating harsh thunder, would present no unapt emblem of the spirit of their abode. Universal discord, strife and warfare must follow. And

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